The Origins of Mary Ann Reading (baptised at Paddington in 1796)
by Francis Howcutt © 2026
This work is openly licenced via CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/

The Origins of Mary Ann Reading (baptised at Paddington in 1796)

This paper explores evidence for the identity of the parents and siblings of Mary Ann who was baptised at St Mary Paddington on 24 July 1796, a daughter of 'William and Ann Reding'. It concludes that there were at least five different couples called William & Ann Reading who had children in the London area during the period 1786-1802.

Francis Howcutt
24 July 2026
francishowcutt@gmail.com

St Mary's church at Paddington Green was rebuilt and the present structure consecrated in 1791. Much about the history of the area, including this picture of the church, can be found in William Robins' account which was published in the middle of the 19th century.[1]

St Mary, Paddington Green

The 1801 census recorded the total population of the area that is now known as Inner London as 940,286.[2] The vast majority lived within what was then the built-up area. In view of the

[1] *Paddington; Past and Present* by William Robins (1853).
https://www.gutenberg.org/files/51123/51123-h/51123-h.htm
[2] GB Historical GIS / University of Portsmouth, Inner London Modern (post-1974) County through time | Historical Statistics on Population | Total Population, A Vision of Britain through Time.
https://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10076845/cube/TOT_POP

This work is openly licenced via CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/

large number of residents, it is therefore not surprising to find that more than one couple with the names William & Ann Reading were producing children there at the same time.

Until July 1837, with the exception of Quakers and Jews, marriages in England and Wales had to take place in Anglican churches. Therefore, parish registers – where surviving - are almost complete records of the weddings that took place there during the latter part of the 18th and earlier part of the 19th century. There are no complete indexes to the marriages, baptisms or burials before civil registration but those in Ancestry's indexes to its scans of London parish registers and on the FreeREG site have extensive coverage; the entries of interest found in these indexes have been checked with the original registers.
Four marriages of couples with the names William & Ann Reading in the London area during 1775-1800 have been identified:

- 5 February 1779 at St Mary Finchley – William Reading, widower, & Ann Lee, spinster, both then of the parish, by banns. William signed his name but Ann made her mark in the register.
- 10 September 1786 at St George Hanover Square - William Reading & Ann Edwards, both then of the parish, by banns. Both bride and groom signed their names in the register.
- 27 June 1790 at St George Hanover Square - William Reading & Ann Walters, both then of the parish, by banns. William signed his name but Ann made her mark in the register. Differences in the signatures (formation of capital 'W' and the letters 'd' and 'g') indicate that the groom in 1790 was not the same person as the groom in 1786.
- 5 October 1795 at St Mary Ealing – William Reading, bachelor & Ann Roberson, spinster, both then of the parish, by banns. Both bride and groom made their marks in the register.

Other couples named William & Ann Reading were married elsewhere in the country, some of whom may have migrated to London in the course of their married lives.

During the period 1786-1802, the births and/or baptisms of 23 children with parents called William & Ann Reading were recorded in these parish or hospital registers in the London area:

- Hammersmith – St Paul (then still as chapelry of All Saints Fulham)
- Harrow – St Mary
- Holborn – British Lying-in hospital (BLI)
- Holborn – St Andrew (SA)
- Paddington – St Mary
- Westminster – St James (SJW)

Name	Born	Baptised	Baptised at	Notes
Harriott	1 Aug 1787	19 Aug 1787	SJW	Buried 1788 at SJW
Sarah		13 Jan 1788	Harrow	'of Weald'
Harriott	3 Jan 1789	25 Jan 1789	SJW	
Jane	7 Aug 1790	19 Aug 1790	Holborn (BLI)	SJW&smith. Mother aged 33
Marianne		3 July 1791	Hammersmith	
Elizabeth	19 Oct 1791[3]	20 Nov 1791	Paddington	

[3] St James Paddington parish register records '1791 - Baptised 20 Nov. Elizabeth daughter of William & John Reading, born Oct. 19.' In view of the christening records at the same church during the following decade there is no doubt that the mother's name was really Ann.

This work is openly licenced via CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/

Ann	6 Dec 1791	8 Dec 1791	Holborn (BLI)	SJW&smith. Mother aged 34
Martha Mary		18 Nov 1792	Hammersmith	
William	23 Feb 1793	24 Mar 1793	Paddington	Buried 1797 at Paddington
Elizabeth		19 May 1793	Harrow	'of Weald'
Jane	21 May 1794	29 May 1794	Holborn (BLI)	SJW&smith. Mother aged 37
John		25 Dec 1794	Paddington	
Mary Ann		24 July 1796	Paddington	
William	12 Aug 1796	18 Aug 1796	Holborn (BLI)	SJW&smith. Mother aged 39
Matthew		22 Jan 1797	Hammersmith	
Zelpha		22 Jan 1797	Hammersmith	
Catherine		18 Feb 1798	Holborn (SA)	'Born at Newport, Bucks.'
Elizabeth		18 Feb 1798	Holborn (SA)	'of Chick Lane'
William		25 Mar 1798	Paddington	
Thomas Coleman	26 Oct 1798	14 Nov 1798	Hammersmith	
Charlotte		17 Mar 1799	Harrow	'of Weald'
Sarah	16 Nov 1800	15 Feb 1801	Paddington	
John	8 May 1801	27 May 1801	Hammersmith	

SJW&smith = Mother's settlement at the parish of St James Westminster & father's occupation a smith.

23 children born or baptised within a period of 15 years were clearly not all siblings. The most likely interpretation of the evidence is that they were drawn from five groups of siblings:

Hammersmith group (6 children) - baptised 1788 to 1801, no obvious parental marriage.

Harrow group (3 children) - baptised in 1788, 1793 and 1799, no obvious parental marriage.

St Andrew Holborn group (2 children) - Both baptised on the same day. As they were not described as twins and one was stated to have been born outside London, it is likely that their parents had married outside London. It is plausible that the parents may have been William Reading and Ann Cooks who were married on 10 July 1791 at St Mary Aylesbury, which is also in Buckinghamshire but some 22 miles from Newport Pagnell.

St James Westminster group (6 children) - The first baptism at St James Westminster took place on 1 August 1787. That date is less than eleven months after the marriage on 10 September 1786 at the adjacent parish of St George Hanover Square of William Reading and Ann Edwards. This strongly suggests that couple were the parents of both children baptised at St James Westminster and also of the four born at the British Lying-in hospital with the mother's parish of settlement recorded as St James Westminster. These six children arrived during 1787-1796 at intervals averaging 22 months. The ages recorded for the mother by the Lying-in hospital indicate she was born about 1757 and so would have been about 29 years old at the time of her marriage. No evidence has been found pointing to the age of the father, the origins of either parent or the death or burial of the parents.

St Mary Paddington group (6 children) – The six children listed below were baptised at St Mary Paddington and born during 1791-1800, also arrived at intervals that averaged 22 months. The birth of the first child took place 16 months after the marriage of William Reading and Ann Walters at the adjacent parish of St George Hanover Square on 27 June 1790.

This work is openly licenced via CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/

Name	Born	Baptism date	Married	Buried/ died*
Elizabeth	19 Oct 1791[4]	20 Nov 1791		
William	23 Feb 1793	24 Mar 1793	n/a	1797 Paddington
John		25 Dec 1794		
Mary Ann		24 July 1796	James Langridge 1822	1862* Croydon
William		25 Mar 1798	Sophia Seeward 1824 Mary Ann Meacham 1846	1875* Poplar
Sarah	16 Nov 1800	15 Feb 1801		

Origins of William Reading and Ann Walters

It is probable that these burial records refer to them:

- 21 January 1821 – William Reading of Stephen Street, Marylebone was buried at St Mary Paddington aged 49, which indicates he was born about 1771.
- 10 April 1825 – Ann Reading of Paddington was buried at St George Hanover Square aged 55 years, which indicates she was born about 1769.

Identifying the birth/baptisms for either of this couple is daunting as it is not known where they were born and many who lived in of late 18th-century London originated elsewhere. When William Reading (1798-1875), who census records state was born at Paddington, married Mary Ann Mecham at St Leonard Shoreditch in 1846 he said his father William Reading was a farmer; this may suggests that the father of the children who were baptised at Paddington may have spent some of his life outside the built-up area of London but that is not necessarily so as at that time Paddington was within easy walking distance of open countryside. Even if either or both the parents did come from the London area, there is no proven candidate, but London parish register baptisms provide at least three possible candidates to be William Reading of Paddington or Ann Walters.

William Reading - During 1769-1773 (ie centred on 1771), these baptisms have been found:

- 14 April 1771 – William son of Jo: & Eleanr. Reading, Thatcher baptised at St John the Baptist Hillingdon.
- 23 August 1772 – William Reading son of William & Ann (born 12 August) baptised at St Marylebone

Ann Walters - During 1767-1771 (i.e. centred on 1769), there is one baptism:

- 11 August 1771 - Ann daughter of George and Rebecca Walters, aged 17 days, baptised at St Mary Rotherhithe.

[4] St James Paddington parish register records '1791 - Baptised 20 Nov. Elizabeth daughter of William & John Reading, born Oct. 19.' In view of the christening records at the same church during the following decade there is no doubt that 'John' was a mistake for 'Ann'.

This work is openly licenced via CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/

Ruth Reading

There may have been another child of William Reading and Ann Walters.

On 17 October 1816, John Hitchcock, a widower and Ruth Reading, a spinster, both of the parish were married by banns at St Mary Marylebone, both signing their names in the register. These records have been found of baptisms of their children, the ceremonies in 1827 and 1831 evidently being the baptism and re-baptism of the same daughter:

- Maria Ann, 17 October 1819 at St Mary Marylebone (born 24 October 1817)
- John, 29 June 1820 at St Mary Marylebone (born 11 June 1820)
- Priscilla, 23 September 1827 at St James Paddington
- Priscilla Amelia, 23 October 1831 at Christ Church Marylebone with the home address of Conduit House Paddington (born 3 September 1827)

The baptism recorded in 1831 is immediately followed in the parish register by the baptism on the same day of William Frederick Robert, son of Robert & Ruth Ing, also of Conduit House Paddington, who had been born on 25 September 1831.

There is little doubt that by the time of the baptisms in 1831 Ruth had been widowed and remarried to Robert Ing. However, no record has been found of such a marriage.

Of the people called John Hitchcock whose burials in the London area during 1827-1831 have been indexed by Ancestry, the most plausible to be Ruth's husband was buried at St Mary Paddington on 8 June 1829, aged 36, his abode being recorded as 'No.1 Robinson Cottage Paddington'. Because of its location, that event is more likely to be of Ruth's husband than the burial at Christ Church Spitalfields on 12 December 1830 of John Hitchcock of Crispin Street, aged 39.

Parish registers and census records have been found for these children of Robert & Ruth Ing:

Name	Born	Baptised		Note
William Frederick Robert	25 Sept 1831	23 Oct 1831	CCM	
Thomas George	5 April 1834	18 May 1834	CCM	of 42 Little London Street Paddington
Henry	1838 (**)			
Emily	c.1839 (***)			

CCM = Baptised at Christ Church Marylebone
(**) Henry Ing who born on 16 April 1839 at 14 Norwich Court in the parish of St Andrew Holborn was a son of John Ing, an undertaker, & Sophia Amelia Ing, formerly Beresford.
(***) see 1851 census below

The 1841 census of Union Street Marylebone includes this household:

Name	Age		Born in Middlesex?
Robert Ind	30-34	Agricultural labourer	No
Ruth Ind	40-44		Yes
William Ind	9		Yes
Thomas Ind	7		Yes
Henry Ind	2		Yes

This work is openly licenced via CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/

The 1851 census recorded two households at 19 Linton Place Marylebone, one of which was:

	Relationship	Age	Occupation	Birth place
Robert Ing	Head	43	Gardiner	Chesham, Bucks.
Ruth Ing	Wife	51		Paddington
William Ing	Son	19	Labourer	Paddington
Thomas Ing	Son	16	Errand boy	Paddington
Emily Ing	Daughter	12		Marylebone

The death of Ruth Ing aged 55 was registered in December quarter 1855 at Marylebone district.

On the balance of possibilities, it is likely that Ruth Reading was born at Paddington as recorded by the 1851 census and that she was a child of William Reading and his wife Ann Walters. In that case, she would have been arrived during the approximate 32 months between their son William (baptised 25 March 1798) and their daughter Sarah (born 16 November 1800). A minor difficulty with this interpretation is that William & Ann Reading had children at regular intervals during the period 1787-1800, all of whom were christened in the Church of England; it would be unusual for such a couple to leave another child out.